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Spring Break travel: Motivations and behaviour in a Mexican destination.

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Abstract

Spring break travel is a growing market and has become a relevant research object. Specifically, binge drinking, illicit drug use and high-risk sexual behaviour have become the focus of academic attention. Identifying such behaviour is relevant in designing policies for tourism management, particularly for the reduction of negative implications of such behaviours. This descriptive study aimed to identify the motivations, alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behavioural patterns of spring break travellers in Acapulco, Mexico. Based on a quantitative approach, a total of 173 male and 112 female North American students were surveyed during spring break 2010. The study revealed that the party reputation of a destination is one of the main reasons for spring break travel. Binge drinking and the use of illegal drugs were reported by a significant number of students. Furthermore, high-risk sexual behaviour and the students' self recognition of being at high risk of acquiring STDs appeared as relevant issues during the study.

Keywords: spring break travel, binge drinking; drug use; sexual behaviour; motivations; Acapulco, Mexico

Introduction

Youth tourism to international destinations has been increasing for decades around the world because travel is especially popular amongst young people. According to Carr (1998), young travellers account for 20% of all international travellers; their sheer number, affluence and spending habits are all relevant. Youthful tourism is also significant at regional levels. According to Bellis et al. (2004), each year over 250,000 young travellers from the United Kingdom alone visit Ibiza, with many more travelling to Greece, Cyprus, and other resorts. Likewise, during the summer of 2007, around 5,100 16-30 year-old Danish tourists travelled to Bulgarian destinations (Hesse et al., 2008). Furthermore, according to the US Department of State, over 100,000 American teenagers and young adults travel to tourism destinations throughout Mexico over spring break each year (www.travel.state.gov, accessed 03 October 2010).

Data like these have prompted academic attention to be focused on the figures themselves and also on the well-known excessive behaviours of young travellers. Various young travellers groups' behaviour has been investigated. Examples of these are the studies on sexual and substance use behaviour among British backpackers in Australia (Hughes et al., 2009); substance use and sexual behaviour of young British travellers in Ibiza (Bellis et al., 2000; see also Elliott et al., 1998); the young Danish tourists' drinking and related problems in Bulgaria (Hesse et al., 2008); and the sexual, drinking and risk-taking behaviour of young

British tourists in Greek summer resorts (Andriotis, 2010). The behaviour of North American spring break travellers in tourism destinations has also attracted researchers' attention.

Spring break has become a well-known North American phenomenon, involving the annual movement of millions of college students and several hundred thousand high school students to domestic and international destinations. Particular academic attention has been put on spring-breakers' behaviour. Pronounced alcohol consumption, drug use and risky sexual practices have been listed as students' behavioural patterns during spring break. However, while many studies have explored the behaviour of students in North American contexts, little is known about spring break behavioural patterns in tourist destinations in developing countries. Exploring these patterns in such contexts is relevant due to the possible implications such behaviours may have not only on tourists themselves but also on the receiving and generating communities.

This paper presents the results of an exploratory research project that looked at students' alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behaviour patterns during spring break in a Mexican tourism destination. It starts by briefly analysing the liminal role of tourism, which is relevant for understanding young travellers' behaviour while on holiday. An overview of existing literature on the behaviour of young travellers around the world is presented. Special attention is given to the discussion of previous research results about students' behaviour during spring break. Details of this study are provided; the setting and methodology are described. Results are presented in terms of travel patterns, alcohol and drug use, and sexual behaviour. Finally, implications and conclusions are drawn.

Tourism and tourist behaviour

In practical terms, tourism and other forms of travel signify a change in different dimensions of individuals' lives. Because travelling implies movement and activities away from the restrictions of home, tourism provides opportunities for adopting different behaviours. Owing to its liminal nature, tourism can be regarded as a temporary respite from individuals' normal lives and provides travellers with a degree of anonymity and freedom (McKercher and Bauer, 2003). As a result, tourism offers opportunities for adopting behaviours different from those of everyday life and allows indulging in behavioural patterns that may exceed the standards of ordinary life. Tourism offers liminal zones in which 'normal rules do not apply' and promotes unusual behaviour, which represents a potential for risk-taking behaviours (Black, 2000: p.252), such liminal zones are widely experienced by young travellers in international resorts.

Youth travel behaviour

Youth travel, particularly to beach-oriented resorts, has been identified as an emerging market during the last two decades. Young travellers often regard holidays as opportunities to escape routine life and indulge in drug use, binge drinking, sexual promiscuity and other risk-taking activities (Andriotis, 2010). This has been revealed by studies that demonstrate, for example, that students drink much more alcohol than usual when away on holiday (Ryan et al., 1996). These behaviours have social, psychological and physiological implications. In the case of alcohol consumption, for example, heavy drinking may lead to blackouts, personal injuries, sudden death, accidents, violence, rape and alcohol dependence. Binge drinking may also heighten the risk of sexually transmitted diseases (Hesse et al., 2008). Accordingly, young tourists' substance use and sexual activity has gained significant attention in academic studies.

One of the earliest studies on young travellers' substance use and sexual behaviour was undertaken by Elliott et al. (1998). The authors proposed measuring the extent of alcohol and drug use, sex and other health risks among young UK travellers on holiday in the Balearic Islands (Spain). The study suggested that holidaymakers were interested in dancing, alcohol and drugs, and this expectation was fulfilled for many of them. It also found an increase in alcohol and drug use (ecstasy) while on holiday. Although sexual encounters did not seem to be uppermost in the minds of young holidaymakers, when compared with those of other young tourists, the levels of alcohol and drug use, and risky sexual behaviour was higher in this group.

In 2000, Bellis et al. (2000) published their study on the changes in substance use and sexual behaviour amongst young travellers. Recognising that little is known about the substance use or sexual behaviour of young people in night-life international holiday resorts, the authors proposed measuring changes in risky behaviours among young travellers. Young people from the UK taking annual holidays in Ibiza were the focus of the study. Travellers' motivations for choosing Ibiza were shown to be primarily the music scene ($n=78\%$), weather ($n=49\%$), sex ($n=23\%$) and drugs ($n=17\%$). It was also found that, with the exception of alcohol, tobacco and ecstasy, individuals were less likely to have used most substances (including amphetamine, ketamine, cannabis, LSD, cocaine and GHB). Almost 54% of interviewees claimed having had at least one sexual partner, and no patterns of substance use were significantly associated with having sex while in the destination. However, it was considered disturbing that over a quarter of all respondents had sex at least once without a condom.

More recently, Hesse et al. (2008) recognise that individuals who are attracted by the 'party reputation' of a destination consume more substances than other young groups. Based on ethnographic research and cross-sectional surveys among tourists in Sunny Beach (Bulgaria), the study attempted to determine how travel agents affect the use of intoxicants among young Danish travellers. Ethnographic observations showed that party package agencies entertain young tourists with risqué shows, singing, dancing, competitions, and drinking games and assist in creating a permissive atmosphere with a clear focus on sex and drunkenness. The authors also found that among party package tourists, almost 59% drank 12 or more units daily or almost daily during their holiday.

Student behaviour during spring break

Student behaviour during spring break travel has been studied mainly during the last two decades. Hobson and Josiam's study (1993), on the travel patterns of the spring break, is noteworthy. In their study, it was determined that there is a substantial percentage of students visiting foreign destinations (Mexico and the Caribbean Islands particularly) during spring break. It was concluded that, contrary to the myth, spring break tourism is not a homogeneous market.

Several studies have concentrated on spring breakers' substance use and sexual behaviour. A clear and relevant piece of work is that of Josiam et al. (1998) which focused on the analysis of the sexual, alcohol and drug related behavioural patterns of spring break travel. The investigation by Smeaton et al. (1998) on alcohol consumption and binge drinking during spring break represents another example demonstrating the importance of analysing the behaviour of young travellers. More recent studies include research by Apostolopoulos et al. (2002) on HIV-risk behaviours of American spring break vacationers. Sönmez et al. (2006) concentrated on the relationship between attitudes and alcohol consumption and casual sexual behaviour.

By and large, it has been shown that student behaviour during spring break is most often extreme in terms of binge drinking, drug taking and sexual activity. Josiam et al. (1998), for example, demonstrated that students ($N=783$) engage in more sexual activity and had more sexual partners during their holiday than at home. Their study reported that 75% of the male students reported a frequency of being intoxicated which ranged from 'everyday' to 'always'. Relating to the use of illegal drugs, it was found that over 31% of the respondents used marijuana during spring break.

Similar figures have been obtained by more recent studies that suggest that certain behavioural patterns are constant in specific tourism destinations. Apostolopoulos et al. (2002), investigating young adults' propensity to engage in HIV-risk behaviours in the spring break context, found that the majority of their research respondents ($N=534$) were motivated to go on spring break by potential opportunities for drinking, trying drugs and sex, and many students chose destinations based on advertisements about such opportunities. The authors found that both males (51%) and females (40%) claimed getting drunk and having drunk until passing out (21% males, 7% females). More recently, Sönmez et al. (2006) found that students have reported ample opportunities for drinking and drug use during spring break. With regard to binge drinking, high percentages of students (64% males and 51% females) reported getting drunk on their previous vacations. The authors also identified a close connection between substance use and sexual-activity decision-making; decisions involving sex were influenced by alcohol and drugs. While accurately identifying students' behaviour may become a challenge due to the nature of the personal data provided by the informant, the studies above have largely concur with regard to the topic.

Spring break travel in Mexico

Mexico has been identified as a popular destination for North American students' spring break travel. It has been reported that over 50% of American students visit Mexico for spring break (Hobson and Josiam, 1993). According to the US Department of State, over 100,000 American teenagers and young adults travel to Mexican destinations during spring break each year. Nine resorts are listed for spring break in Mexico; these are mostly located on the Pacific coast (www.mexicospringbreak.com). In particular, Cancun and Acapulco are listed as top international destinations. Although Cancun receives the great majority of students during spring break, Acapulco hosts a large number of spring breakers, too. Acapulco has become one of the most important tourist destinations in Mexico for spring break due to the number of beaches, leisure activities and its legendary night life. Acapulco is one of the Mexico's hottest spring break destinations. With over 10 world night class clubs, Acapulco is considered by many to have the world's best night life. Throw that together with Acapulco's near perfect spring break climate, warm water and awesome beaches and scenery and you come out with a formula for doing spring break right (www.mexicospringbreak.com).

In spite of its size, spring break travel in Mexico has received little attention, if any at all. The great majority of existing reports on spring break arrivals and on students' behaviour are journalistic, and therefore figures should be taken with adequate caution. It has been reported that spring break travel is an important market for Mexico. A large portion of this market is concentrated in Acapulco, where over 20,000 student arrivals were estimated in

2009 (Juárez, 2009). In Acapulco, Spring breakers' economic contribution is thought to be very significant because they account for the greatest portion of international tourists during the spring break season (Pacheco, 2009).

According to the domestic (Mexican) press, although the number of spring break students visiting Acapulco is large, the economic benefit of such a market is questionable. For the most part, the travel and accommodation services purchased are those offered by North American tour operators. Furthermore, the limited economic benefit in Acapulco is further reduced by the fact that most students stay in four specific hotels in the destination (Juárez, 2009); this is not surprising for only very few hotels in Acapulco are advertised on spring break websites (see for example www.mexicospringbreak.com and www.springbreak.com). Finally, the benefit of spring break to the destination is questioned because of the behaviours reported by the media. Specifically, excessive alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behavioural patterns in the destination have been reported by local newspapers (*Milenio*, www.milenio.com, 07/03/2009).

Methods

The aim of this study was to explore the behaviour of young travellers in terms of alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behaviour during spring break 2010 in Acapulco. For the purpose of the study, a quantitative approach was adopted; specifically, the survey method was used. The decision to use a quantitative method was based on the deductive approach, objective epistemology, etic perspective and the structured, systematic and replicable nature that quantitative methods potentially offer (Jennings, 2001). Quantitative methods can be significantly fruitful if the basic principles of statistics, such as having a well-defined population size and a representative sample, are obeyed. Additionally, the survey method has been widely used when investigating the behaviour of young travellers (see for example Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Batalla-Duran et al., 2003; Bellis et al., 2000; Bellis et al., 2004; Elliott et al., 1998; Hesse et al., 2008; Hobson and Josiam, 1993; Josiam et al., 1998; Sönmez et al., 2006). The wide-spread adoption of quantitative methods, however, does not mean that interpretative research methods are not useful; some studies have adopted qualitative interviews (Elliott et al., 1998) and ethnographic approaches (Hesse et al., 2008, Palma, 2007) for exploring the phenomena of young travellers' substance use and sexual behaviour. Nonetheless, the actual validity of qualitative approaches has not been sufficiently tested.

The questionnaire was largely based on the instrument used by Josiam et al. (1998). It also took more recent literature and Mexican contextual conditions into account. The instrument consisted of 36 closed-ended items evaluating several aspects. Socio-demographic data

such as age, gender, and educations were included first. Then, details of respondents' plans for their stay in the destination, as well as the amount of money to be spent were part of the questionnaire. Reasons for travel during spring break and for going to Acapulco were then brought in. Finally questions on alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behaviour were added.

Regarding alcohol consumption, the instrument sought mainly to identify the number of drinks students had had during their stay. As for drugs, similar issues were evaluated, that is, whether students were offered drugs, the type of drugs they used and their perception that laws regarding drugs are enforced with less rigour in Mexico. With regard to sexual behaviour, the frequency of sexual activity, number of partners and the use of condom were examined. Due to time and financial restrictions, a pilot study was not possible. However, the instrument could be validated bearing in mind that it had proved to be effective in the study of Josiam et al. (1998).

A total of 285 questionnaires were administered to 173 male and 112 female students spending spring break in Acapulco. Because it was difficult, if not impossible, to accurately determine the total population of spring breakers in the destination, a convenience sampling approach was adopted. Informants were gathered based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. This, of course, has implications on the possible generalization of findings. The survey was undertaken during the third week of March 2010. Students were approached while on the beach from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The survey was self-administered and informants were guaranteed confidentiality. Because most students were staying at specific hotels, the researchers had to approach students near the premises of three of the most popular hotels among students in Acapulco in 2010.

Also, most questionnaires were administered on the beach because a large number of students were attending the *Spring Break Challenge 2010* event that was taking place on the beach. Unlike previous studies, such as that of Josiam et al. (1998), in which less than 2% of the students refused to complete the survey, the response rate for this study was lower. About half of the people approached refused to participate in the survey. According to the researchers, this was mainly due to spring breakers' perception that the researchers were beach vendors, who frequently 'harass' students on the beach. Despite the low response rate, it is believed that the sample obtained is still useful for an exploratory study.

Student profile

Over 37% percent of students were between 17 and 20 years old; 55.5% between 21 and 25; and almost 8% were older than 26. A substantial number were college seniors, that is, in the

last of the four years typically required for a BA degree in the US. At the time of the survey, over 43% of students had spent from 3 to 5 nights in Acapulco, and a majority (55%) planned to stay seven or eight days in the destination (Mean=6). For 69% of informants this was the first time they had visited Acapulco, and for 17%, the second.

Seventy-one percent reported spending more than \$81 USD per day in Acapulco. The estimated total cost of the spring travel was more than \$901 USD for over 83% of students. The total expenditure may depend significantly on the distance travelled (international trip), given that previous studies have reported a total cost of \$500 USD or less in domestic spring break trips (Hobson and Josiam, 1993). Thus, it can be said that the economic benefit of spring break travel to Acapulco is of importance. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that because travel agents have been reported to book nearly 25% of the spring break trips (Hobson and Josiam, 1993), and the vast majority stay in specific large hotels, the economic benefit to the community should be questioned.

Reasons for spring break travel

The study revealed that there were three main reasons for students to travel during spring break, 'I wanted to go wild' (24.9%), 'I had friends going' (23.9%), and 'I wanted to get away' (14.4%). There does seem to be a difference depending on gender. For males, the reasons given above ranked the same; however, for females, the main reasons were 'I had friends going' (28.6%), 'I wanted to get away' (17.9%) and 'I wanted to go wild' (15.2%) (see Table 1, below).

The study revealed several reasons for travelling to Acapulco; 'Good spring break party reputation' (49.1%) and 'I had friends going there' (25.6%) were the two most important ones (see Table 2, below). These figures concurred with previous investigations that found that 44% and 27% of students visited Panama City Beach during spring break for the same reasons, respectively (Josiam et al., 1998). Motivations appeared to be almost the same both for males and females. However, it is clear that 'Good spring break party reputation' is the main reason for more males (52.6%) as compared with females (43.8%).

Table 1. Reasons for taking a spring break trip

Reason	Total		Males		Females	
	n=285	%	n=173	%	n=112	%
A relaxing vacation sounded inviting	14	4.9	9	5.2	5	4.5
I had friends going	68	2.4	36	20.8	32	28.6
It's just the thing to do during spring break	25	8.8	12	6.9	13	11.6
I wanted a dose of 'sun, surf and sand'	15	5.3	9	5.2	6	5.4
I wanted to get away	41	14.5	21	12.1	20	17.9
I wanted to 'go wild'	71	25.1	54	31.2	17	15.2
Other	50	17.7	32	18.5	18	16.1
Missing	1	0.4	0	0	1	0.9

Table 2. Reasons for going to Acapulco for spring break

Reason	Total		Males		Females	
	n=285	%	n=173	%	n=112	%
Good recreation	4	1.4	2	1.2	2	1.8
Good spring break party reputation	140	49.1	91	52.6	49	43.8
I had friends going there	73	25.6	34	19.7	39	34.8
Mexican permissiveness	5	1.8	3	1.7	2	1.8
My friends said it was a good place	14	4.9	10	5.8	4	3.6
The price was right	10	3.5	7	4.0	3	2.7
Other	38	13.3	26	15.0	12	10.7
Missing	1	0.4	0	0	1	0.9

Alcohol consumption

As previously stated, excessive alcohol consumption has been identified as a feature of spring break behaviour. This study strongly supports that conclusion. The majority of students (59.3%) reported having drunk 13 drinks or more between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. the day before. The consumption of such amount of alcohol is more dominant in males than females, 62.4% and 40.17%, respectively. It was mainly 20-to-25-year-old respondents who had 13 or more drinks during this period. It is worth noticing that the number of students having 13 or more drinks seems to increase during the night. Sixty-eight percent reported drinking that amount between 6 p.m. and 2 a.m. the night before. Again, the number of

males having this number of drinks was higher than the number of females (70%, 50%, respectively). Finally, it should be noted that only 3.8% reported not having any drink at all during that time.

Students were asked to say how often they had been intoxicated during their stay in Acapulco. Forty-two percent reported having been intoxicated several times and 17.9%, always. Furthermore, 45% of respondents indicated they had been intoxicated to the point of passing out several times; 21.4% at least once, and 21.1% never. Finally, students were asked whether they considered it easier to get drugs and alcohol in Mexico than in the USA. Interestingly, many students (42%) responded positively. This holds relevant implications as the availability of drugs and alcohol may have a direct positive effect on the levels of substance consumption in specific contexts.

Drug use

The instrument also explored aspects of drug use, specifically whether students had been offered drugs in the destination during this spring break. Over 88% responded affirmatively. This number exceeds the figures presented in other studies investigating the same issue, Josiam et al. (1998) report 51.5%. However, the availability of drugs differed from the fact of actually trying to obtain drugs. Only 20% of students stated they had tried to get drugs during spring break.

Table 3. Drug used during spring break

Drug	%
Marijuana or Hash (Pot)	27.3
Crack	6.6
Cocaine (Coke)	15.6
Heroin (Smack)	5.4
Poppers (Rush)	1.9
LSD (Acid)	0.8
Nitrous Oxide (Whippets)	1.2
Amphetamines (Speed/ Uppers)	3.9
Peyote Buttons	0.8
Ecstasy (E)	0.4
Mushrooms (Shrooms)	0.8
Barbiturates (Downers)	0.8
Other	4.1

Two drugs were the most frequently used: marijuana and cocaine. Twenty-seven percent reported having used marijuana during their stay in Acapulco (see Table 3). This finding

largely concurs with others, in which 31% of respondents reported having used the drug (Josiam et al., 1998). The use of illegal drugs in Acapulco may be explained by the number of students having been offered drugs during their vacation and their perception that Mexican laws pertaining to drugs are enforced less rigorously. This proposition however requires further empirical data.

Sexual behaviour

According to the findings, 199 informants brought condoms with them. A total of 209 had sex during the spring break; 66.5% males and 33.5% females. Almost the same number of sexual acts was reported by males and females. Among males, the mean number of intercourse acts during spring break was 1.7 and for females 1.6. Acts of intercourse took place with i) a person with whom students had an ongoing sexual relationship; ii) a person whom they met prior to the break and; iii) a person they met during the break. The use of condom was also explored in each of the cases. It should be noted that there is a common lack of protection during intercourse. Condom use does not always take place with new partners (see Table 4).

Table 4. Condom use in terms of partner type

Type of sexual partner	<i>n</i>	% Always Very often Often Sometimes Rarely Never Missing						
		Always	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Missing
Ongoing relationship	161	6.2	0.6	13.0	8.1	42.9	29.2	0
New partner before spring break	169	8.9	3.6	17.8	12.4	4.1	13.0	34.3*
New partner met during spring break	165	9.7	6.1	16.4	14.5	10.3	12.7	30.3*

* many informants did not respond to the question regarding condom use

Finally one more issue was explored. It was related to students' perception of their chances of getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Regarding this issue, it is worrisome to note that over 60% consider that they are at a (very) high risk of getting STDs (see Table 5, below). This may be related to the inconsistency in their use of condoms.

Implications

This study confirms that the party reputation of a destination is very important for spring break holiday decision making. Also, the 'stereotypical' excessive behaviour of spring breakers was confirmed. Particularly, the findings of this study concurred with previous research revealing that binge drinking is more frequent among students during spring break

travel. Additionally, students' use of drugs during vacation also appeared as a relevant issue, and the idea that substance use is a frequent motive for, or at least an activity during spring break, was corroborated (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Josiam et al., 1998). It needs to be noted also that marijuana use in Acapulco seems to be more frequent than in other destinations, and it takes place among minors, which becomes an issue that needs to be addressed by tourism decision makers. With regard to sexual behaviour, it was found that students are at a high risk of getting STDs, given that condom use, particularly during intercourse with new partners, does not take place on a regular basis.

Table 5. Opinion towards own chances of getting an STD

Gender	Chances					
	%					
	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low	Missing
Females	40.2	18.8	21.4	4.5	0.9	14.3
Males	37	15	20.2	9.8	6.4	11.6

These findings have important empirical implications. As previous research has demonstrated (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002), the abuse of alcohol and drugs during spring break are closely related to risk behaviour. Excessive alcohol consumption and illicit drugs, the cloak of anonymity that the spring break vacation provides, and heightened social interaction in an environment of permissiveness, all facilitate risk-taking by the students (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002: p. 741). In Mexico's case, this is further exacerbated, firstly, by the fact that alcohol and drugs are more easily obtained in Mexican destinations than in their home country and, secondly, by the perception that laws pertaining alcohol consumption and drug use are enforced with less rigour in the country visited. Additionally, attention must be paid to the implications of multiple sexual partners and the lack of condom use during intercourse. The lack of protection may lead, among other issues, to unwanted pregnancy and to the spread of sexual diseases, not only among spring breakers themselves but also among residents of receiving and generating communities.

Conclusion

This study identified motivations, alcohol consumption, drug use and sexual behaviour of students on spring break in Acapulco, Mexico. In particular, it revealed that students get into heavy alcohol consumption, illicit drug use and high-risk sexual activity during spring break travel. Taken as a whole, these results strongly concur with previous research, which may support the validity of the results presented here. In particular, this study suggests that the liminal role of tourism offers students the opportunity for adopting excessive behaviours.

Also, the consumption of alcohol, drugs and the adoption of other risk-taking behaviours appear to increase in the context of developing countries. Thus it can be concluded that spring breakers' behaviours in developing destinations are enhanced by two factors mainly: the liminal role of tourism and the level of permissiveness of such countries. In this study, the party reputation of the destination may also be a relevant factor for the understanding of students' extreme behaviour.

While this study gave answers to several questions, there are still many gaps to be filled. Among other topics, the reasons for students' behaviour during spring break need attention. Although most investigations are consistent in terms of students' behavioural patterns, the reasons why they get involved in heavy alcohol consumption, substance use and high-risk sexual behaviour are unknown. The relationships among spring breakers' alcohol, drugs, condom use and risk remain uncovered; they deserve special attention as it has been found that alcohol and drugs influence students' decisions involving sex (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002). The analysis of such relationships is of practical relevance because, as suggested by the discussion above, students have been identified as a group likely to be sexually active and to engage in unprotected sex. Also, exactly how students' behavioural patterns are shaped by the economic, social, cultural and legal conditions of destinations is still undiscovered. Furthermore, the actual implications of students' behaviour, not only for them but also for communities, should be addressed.

The results of this study should not be generalised nor applied to other Mexican tourist destinations such as Cancun, Los Cabos or Mazatlan, for example. This is because, as acknowledged by the authors, a possible limitation of the study is the non-probabilistic character of the sample. The non-existence of an accurate number of the spring break population and a sampling frame did not allow having a representative sample of the population under study. It would be wrong to believe that the economic, social, cultural, legal and tourist conditions of other spring break destinations in the country are the same as those in Acapulco. To make this and other similar investigations applicable to other spring break destinations, more comprehensive analyses of results in different contexts are urgently needed. It is also necessary to strictly follow the basic principles of statistics.

Additionally, the adoption of the survey as a research technique has implications on the reliability of the data obtained. On the one hand, quantitative methods do not allow researchers to study in depth the responses provided by informants and, on the other, the responses are limited to those offered by the etic perspective of the researchers. The fact that a significant part of informants refused to participate in the study may also have

implications. Also, the possibility of students giving a false response to the questions or exaggerating when responding should also be borne in mind when assessing the validity of this study. Thus, the adoption of alternative and complementary research techniques may help increase the reliability of this study and get a more comprehensive view of spring break students' behaviours.

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